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UNCLAS YEREVAN 000267

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ARMENIA: KURDS DEMONSTRATE FOR OCALAN

REF: 04 YEREVAN 2417

1. (SBU) Marking the sixth anniversary of the capture of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan, about 250 ethnic Kurds came to Yerevan in buses February 15 to stage a peaceful march across downtown Yerevan and demonstrate in front of Armenian Government buildings and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office building. Organized by the Kurdistan Committee, an Armenian NGO affiliated with Kongra Gel, the demonstrators left a letter with UNDP Staff explaining that the purpose of their march was to support Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan and condemn "the international conspiracy ... led by the U.S. ... to discourage the Kurds from pursuing their fair cause." The most recent similar demonstration by the Kurdish community was October 29, 2004 (reftel).

2. (SBU) At least five busloads of demonstrators assembled midday in Yerevan's Opera Square, marched about one mile to the government buildings around Republic Square where they made several speeches in Kurdish and handed out flyers explaining their demonstration. While there was police presence along the route, including one armored vehicle, both the police and demonstrators remained calm and nonviolent.

BACKGROUND

3. (U) According to the GOAM, there are about 30,000 ethnic Kurds living in Armenia, concentrated around 21 small agricultural villages in the Aragatsotn region 20 miles northwest of Yerevan. This number includes a small number of Christian and Muslim Kurds as well as a larger number of Yezidis, who have a unique religion that proscribes, among other things, wearing the color blue and eating lettuce.
GODFREY